

Nuclear Energy in the Carolinas – Real Opportunities

By Scott Macfarland, Human Resources Manager, SCANA/SCE&G, and chairman of the Workforce Development Task Force for the Carolina Nuclear Cluster



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The demographics of the nuclear energy workforce have a real message for current tech school and university students, and also for people in mid-high and high school: Our industry needs new employees to help maintain our current level of operations and also the new-build in our industry. Our workforce is aging, and we need to have a sustained program of bringing in new people over the next decade. In fact, almost half of the energy engineers and craft-level employees are eligible to retire in the next few years.

Our industry plans ahead for these workforce needs. For our current nuclear unit at V.C. Summer Nuclear Station and, for what SCANA needs to staff the two additional units being constructed, we have identified four critical job groups:

operators, health physics technicians, engineers and maintenance craft technicians. We then identified schools that could be feeder groups providing talent into a pipeline for each critical job group.

I am asked whether we expect to hire most of the people who successfully complete specialty programs, such as the nuclear training program at Midlands Technical College, and then apply to SCANA. Of course there is no guarantee of a job when they graduate. No company can do that, but students can plan for a better chance to be hired.

The students who do well in school and are also a good fit for our organization have the best chance for employment. “Doing well” has various meanings. Academics are important, especially in math, sciences and engineering. We also find that our best candidates know how to communicate well and work well as team-members. A clean personal record of behavior is also critical to success in our industry – no trouble with the police, no issues with drugs or alcohol.

Our industry is entrusted with ensuring safety as well as supplying an important service. Nuclear organizations have a strong safety culture, and the clean standard of behavior should be communicated to students before they enter any program. I meet with each class as they start at Midlands Tech and emphasize the importance of showing up when you are supposed to, working hard in school and on the job, and staying drug free. Our summer intern programs also help get that message across. These student employees are drug tested before they start and may be randomly tested at any time.

For students interested in the nuclear energy field I encourage them to talk with their tech college counselors if they are looking at a career in something like a nuclear

operator. For that job, students graduate from a tech school and then finish their certification, by federal government mandate, at a utility.

For students interested in four-year engineering degrees, we have excellent programs at USC, SC State, Clemson, UNC Charlotte and NC State. Many people think you have to be a nuclear engineer to work in our industry. We do hire nuclear engineers, but students majoring in mechanical and electrical engineering are often in the most demand.

The Carolinas Nuclear Cluster is a collaboration of 47 organizations working under the 'new Carolina' umbrella, who are building the nuclear energy industry across both Carolinas.